



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

News Release

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR

WILLIAM J. AILA JR, CHAIRPERSON
Phone: (808) 587-0320
Fax: (808) 587-0390

For Immediate Release December 15, 2012

DLNR CELEBRATES A NEW CHRISTMAS TRADITION TO PROTECT HAWAII'S RAREST BIRDS

KULANI, HAWAII – A new Christmas tradition is taking place in remote forests above Hilo. Early in the morning, volunteers scan the trees, looking for jewels far more beautiful than any Christmas ornament. These volunteers are on a quest to find Hawai'i's rarest native birds.

Today, December 15, the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Natural Area Reserves System (NARS), the Three Mountain Alliance (TMA), and the Hawai'i Audubon Society invited community members to help search through the forest and count native birds in an annual survey of the forest.

This is the fourth year that Christmas Bird Counts was held in Kūlani and the 113th since the Audubon Society started this family tradition. Volunteers were paired with expert bird watchers to record all sightings or sounds of the birds.

"The Pu'u Maka'ala Natural Area Reserve at Kūlani is one of the last refuges for Hawai'i's native birds. This free event gives the community a rare chance to see these beautiful species," says Anya Tagawa, NARS education coordinator.

One of the native birds viewable at the Pu'u Maka'ala NAR is the endangered 'Akiapōlā'au, a Hawaiian Honeycreeper only found on the Big Island. This bright yellow bird has evolved to fill the role occupied by woodpeckers in many other parts of the world. It creeps along trunks and branches tapping holes in the rotten bark with its lower beak and extracts grubs and other insects with its sharply curved upper beak.

"The annual Christmas bird count is a great opportunity for the community to experience what makes Hawai'i so unique," says Lisa Hadway, manager of the Hawai'i island NARS. "Our goal is to foster a better understanding of our native species and places we are so privileged to protect."

Over half of Hawai'i's native forest has been lost, leaving little habitat left for these birds. In turn, over half of Hawai'i's forest bird species have gone extinct, and almost all populations are declining. "These

surveys help us keep track of how the various populations are doing, and where they remain,” says Hadway. “Then, the DLNR can focus its efforts to where they protect forests from invasive species.”

In addition to saving native species, forest protection secures Hawai‘i’s water supplies. Hawai‘i’s native forests collect rain and fog, providing water for human use. Forests also prevent erosion that muddies beaches and reefs.

After the bird count, volunteers planted a variety of critically endangered native seedlings. Among them were Hāhā (*Cyanea shipmanii*), an endangered small tree that is cloaked with little thorns and boasts showy greenish-white flowers and ‘Ōhawai (*Clermontia peleana*) a shrub or small tree that produces a curved beak-like flower that is so purple it is almost black. “Every seedling I planted was a little Christmas gift to the forest,” says Christine Ahia, a volunteer from Hilo. “If we all work together, we can save these incredible forests for our future generations.”

#

Images are available at:

<https://plus.google.com/101613020396360217549/photos#photos/101613020396360217549/albums/5822361645373626769>

For more information news media may contact:

Deborah Ward
DLNR Public Information Specialist
Phone: (808) 587-0320